

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Vice President Biden Says Kenyan Reforms Will Attract American Investment

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Through a new constitution and strengthened democratic institutions, Kenya will attract greater American investment, which in turn will generate additional investment from other areas of the world, Vice President Biden told reporters in Kenya.

In remarks with President Mwai Kibaki in Nairobi June 8, Biden said he is “truly impressed” by the cooperation between Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga and by their “mutual commitment to reform.”

Kenyans are scheduled to vote in an August 4 referendum on a new constitution that would limit presidential powers while strengthening civil liberties, and Biden repeated President Obama’s observation that the referendum marks “a singular opportunity to put Kenyan governance on a more solid footing that can move beyond ethnic violence, and move beyond corruption, [and] can move the country toward a path of economic prosperity.”

Noting that two-thirds of Kenyans are under age 25 and would greatly benefit from a more prosperous economy, Biden said better governance will lead to job creation and economic growth, and that the United States is prepared to move forward with Kenya as it implements its reforms.

“Putting in place a new constitution and strengthening your democratic institutions with the rule of law will further open the door to major American development programs such as the Millennium Challenge and will, I predict, bring about reinvestment by American corporations and international organizations in Kenya that could provide millions of dollars in assistance in grants through the Millennium Challenge,” he said.

Reforms will create “a completely different atmosphere about investment in this country,” Biden said.

“Americans want to do business here, they want to travel here, and with the right climate they will come,” he said, adding his observation that when Americans invest “it has the tendency to generate additional investment ... from other parts of the world.”

President Kibaki said the August 4 referendum “is the most important reform initiative for the Grand Coalition Government,” which was formed after ethnic violence swept the country in 2008. He expressed confidence that the vote will result in a new constitution for his country.

Expressing appreciation for U.S. economic assistance,

Kibaki also urged the United States to encourage private American investors to take advantage of the East African Common Market, which will come into existence July 1. The market, comprising Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, is expected to help integrate the region through eased travel restrictions, lower tariffs and increased security cooperation.

Kibaki said Kenya and the United States share concerns over the continued piracy and instability emanating from Somalia and he urged U.S. leadership for an international effort to stabilize the country. He also said the best way to support stability in Sudan is for all parties to respect the outcome of the planned January 2011 referendum on the independence of southern Sudan and Abyei that has been called for under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Secretary Clinton Calls for Reforms at OAS Meeting in Peru

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A rising generation of young people in the Americas stands poised to lead the region in the coming years, but these young people are waiting because they know their future depends on the decisions that hemispheric leaders will make today, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

These young people, who are versed in the technologies of the 21st century and enriched by the diversity of multicultural societies, will build the businesses, discover the innovations, and develop the future, Clinton said June 7 before the Organization of American States General Assembly.

“Our hemisphere stands at a crossroads today,” Clinton said.

Rather than watch another generation “frustrated by democratic dreams deferred and economic potential denied,” she said, the leaders of the Western Hemisphere can promote practical and productive collaboration that works for progress.

Clinton proposed three steps to help the OAS achieve its vision.

“First, we need to refocus the institution on its core mission of advancing strong democratic institutions that foster peace, citizen security and opportunity for all,” she said. The current OAS structure suffers from a proliferation of priorities and mandates that dilute its efforts, drain the budget and diminish its capacity, she added.

Second, Clinton recommended that the OAS work to reform its budget and take responsibility for how its funds are spent. The current system, she argued, is unsustainable and threatens the organization's viability.

And finally, she said, it is time for the OAS to implement the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Clinton pledged the United States to work with others to develop a plan and the means to carry it out and see the charter fully adopted by its 10th anniversary in September 2011.

Clinton met separately with Peruvian President Alan Garcia June 7 and praised the country's support for nonproliferation, which she said sends a message of unity to those who seek to advance their own nuclear threats — referring to nuclear weapons development programs by North Korea and Iran. She also met with other leaders from South America regarding Iran's actions and efforts under way at the U.N. Security Council for an additional set of sanctions.

HONDURAS

Clinton also called on the OAS to welcome Honduras back into the organization.

"We've worked with many of you to help Honduras find a path back to democratic order," she said, and the Honduran leadership under newly elected President Porfirio Lobo has worked to meet obligations under a peace accord agreed to before the November 2009 presidential elections and now as he formed a government of national reconciliation and a truth commission.

"This has demonstrated a strong and consistent commitment to democratic governance and constitutional order," Clinton added. But in addition to meeting agreed-to commitments, the OAS can also help Honduras identify the conditions that caused a coup last year and eliminate them to avoid a future crisis.

The OAS suspended Honduras from the 35-member organization following the 2009 coup. Since then, a number of nations have refused to recognize the new Honduran leader, who was elected in November 2009. The leader of the interim government stepped down after the election, and former President Manuel Zelaya was not eligible under the Honduran Constitution to serve longer than January, when Lobo assumed office.

"Now is the time for the hemisphere as a whole to move forward and welcome Honduras back into the inter-American community," Clinton said.

Clinton is on a brief visit to South America and the Caribbean. Her visit began with the OAS General

Assembly meeting in Lima, Peru, and continues with a major foreign policy speech in Quito, Ecuador, June 8, before meetings in Colombia and with leaders from the Caribbean nations in Barbados on June 9.

Clinton travels to Colombia for meetings with government leaders and with the two presidential candidates — Antanas Mockus and Juan Manuel Santos. In Bogota, she will be discussing elements of the bilateral relationship with Colombia, as well as with the two candidates. Colombia is going through an electoral process; the first round was held May 30 and the next round is June 20.

Clinton meets with leaders of the Caribbean nations in Barbados, which follows up on a recent meeting in Washington on the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). The CBSI is the Obama administration's effort to work with countries of the Caribbean to address the problems of crime, violence and narcotrafficking.

Computer Hackers in White Hats

New breed of humanitarians finds ideas to save lives when disasters strike

By Christopher Connell

Special Correspondent

Washington — Vint Cerf, the computer scientist often called the father of the Internet, looked out at the audience gathered beneath the chandeliers of the Benjamin Franklin Room and observed, "This is probably the geekiest gathering ever in the history of the State Department."

The words — which recall President John F. Kennedy's quip that the Nobel Prize winners he had invited to the White House were the most extraordinary collection of talent ever gathered there, "with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone" — were a tribute to an assemblage of 150 software developers and computer-code writers who were giving up their weekends to trade ideas and design applications for disaster response and relief.

They proudly call themselves hackers, but not the kind who break into computer systems and networks to cause harm. These are the hackers who work together to write free public software and computer programs, and keep "hacking" it to get all the bugs out.

The weekend push in Washington and in several other cities around the world — Jakarta, Indonesia; Nairobi, Kenya; Porto Alegre and São Paulo, Brazil; Santiago, Chile; and Sydney, Australia — was the latest effort by a movement that calls itself Random Hacks of Kindness and boasts a heavyweight lineup of corporate and government sponsors — Google Inc., Microsoft

Corporation, NASA, the World Bank and Yahoo Inc.

Ambassador Elizabeth Frawley Bagley, the State Department's special representative for global partnerships, hosted the reception on the eve of the code-writing marathon, held at a Microsoft facility in the Washington suburbs. "You truly are building a global community dedicated to serving disaster relief challenges through technology," Bagley told the programmers.

Another speaker, Pamela Cox, World Bank vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean, extolled the programmers for a mobile phone application called "I'm OK," which they produced at their first gathering in Mountain View, California, last year. The application, downloadable from <http://imokapp.appspot.com>, allows anyone to register on the "I'm OK" website, then, after disaster strikes, send a single text message notifying family and friends they are safe. Cox said it proved useful in both the Haiti and Chile earthquakes. It is "on my phone and on the phone of each of the World Bank staff working in Haiti," she said.

For this technology-minded crowd, the 66-year-old, nattily dressed Cerf — in three-piece suit with "CTRL" and "ESC" on his cuff links — clearly was a star. He acknowledged the work that tech volunteers did after an earthquake destroyed much of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, January 12, but said what is really needed are innovations prepared and rolled out in advance that have everyday applications, not just for crises.

"The best ideas are the ones that get used by everybody all the time," said Cerf. He exhorted the volunteers to think up and design sustainable applications "so we know they work when we need them and we don't have to scramble to put them together in an emergency."

Cerf is a former program manager for the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) who, with Robert Kahn in the early 1970s, designed the software code used to transmit data over the Internet. Their breakthrough communication protocols (TCP/IP) allowed computers to "speak" to each other.

Later, he led the creation of the first commercial e-mail service for MCI Communications. Since 2005, he's worked for Google, the technology and search-engine giant, as a vice president and "chief Internet evangelist."

"It's kind of surreal to be here," said Jordan Breighner, 24, who said Cerf was one of his idols growing up. Breighner, who has done technology work for the government on emergency response and now works in the private sector, said he did not know how much he could contribute to the weekend programming marathon, "but that's kind of the fun of it. You just go and see what you can learn and

contribute."

Trey Smith, a Carnegie Mellon University systems scientist who works at the NASA Ames Research Center in California on robotics and linking photos to specific geographic locations (geotagging) for emergency responders, was on the team at the first Random Hacks of Kindness gathering in California last fall. He is a strong believer in these group efforts. "It really helps to have other coders around you," he said.

Microsoft Vice President Curt Kolcun, who runs the company's U.S. public sector business unit, said, "We all love technology in our community, but sometimes we produce solutions for solutions' sake." Partnering with such organizations as NASA, the World Bank and emergency responders helps the technical community to understand a problem and make meaningful contributions to solving it, he said.

At the end of the code-writing marathon, judges chose one project as the best of the Random Hacks of Kindness. It was a computer application, based on a numerical formula, with graphics to help engineers visualize the risks of landslides.

The weekend event was organized by SecondMuse, a consulting firm, and Crisis Commons, a community of technology workers and emergency responders that organized the Crisis Camp Haiti meetings last January to answer cries for help from Haiti.

Students from Taiwan, Egypt, Singapore Win U.S. Website Contest

First-place Doors to Diplomacy prize goes to website on food security

By Louise Fenner
Staff Writer

Washington — Students from Taiwan, Egypt and Singapore created websites on three very different themes — world hunger, world peace and government censorship — that earned special recognition in the 2010 Doors to Diplomacy website contest sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

These teams were the first-, second- and third-place international winners in the contest, which challenges students to create websites that teach the importance of international affairs and diplomacy. Three American winners were also named. The winners were selected from 263 teams representing 29 countries.

Yvonne Marie Andres of Global SchoolNet, co-sponsor of the contest, says a surge in entries this year — 30 percent more than in 2009 — reflects a growing interest in civics and international affairs.

"I've noticed that more and more schools are adopting programs that have a focus on global awareness and civic responsibility," she said. The students who participate in Doors to Diplomacy "believe they can make a difference and can actually help prevent problems and solve problems."

"We're not really looking for fancy websites — we're looking at their educational value," Andres added. The websites need to be well-researched and easy to navigate, and the students must explain "the process they went through, why they picked their topic, what position they took — because some of the topics can be quite controversial — what they learned, and the fairness in their perspective."

Students on the teams that won first place (from Taiwan and New York) each receive a \$2,000 scholarship, and their adult advisers receive \$500 for their schools.

WINNING WEBSITES

The students from Taiwan faced some logistical challenges in creating "The Silent Tsunami: Global Food Crisis" because three attended Ming-Dao High School in Taichung and the fourth went to Da-Zhi High School in Taipei. Their website presents a wrenching look at the more than 1 billion people who suffer from hunger and tries to offer some solutions. "We must start caring about the food crisis now," the students wrote in their project summary.

The website stood out, said Monica Perry, a public affairs specialist with the State Department and one of the Doors to Diplomacy judges, because of "the depth of research that this team put into the site, but they presented it in such a way that the user didn't feel overwhelmed."

The top American team's website, "Promoting Diplomacy Through Communication," includes some videos in American Sign Language. Three of the students communicated with the fourth, who is deaf, through a sign-language interpreter. The four said they learned "about how things work when there is positive communication and how things fail when communication lacks." They applied their experiences to designing the website, which encourages awareness and understanding of other cultures as tools for better international relations.

The website's message is important, said Perry. International diplomacy is now conducted via social media as well as face to face, she said, and "understanding of others is the first place we start."

The second-place international award went to two students from different schools in Alexandria, Egypt, who worked together through the Young People's Library at

the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Their web project, "Peace Around the World," explores the idea that "peace and democracy are two faces of the same coin; they are linked together." It includes profiles of peacemakers such as Anwar El-Sadat, Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela. "We were inspired by the immortal figures who devoted their lives for giving peaceful life to their community and tried to spread their words of peace," the students wrote.

Four students from Raffles Institution in Singapore won third place for "Censorship in Singapore," which considers arguments for and against various types of censorship. "Our motive here is to present a complete picture of censorship, not to persuade you to one side or another," the website says. In their project summary, the students said many people declined to be interviewed out of concern that the subject of censorship was "too sensitive."

The second-place U.S. winners, from Maryland, created "Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and Leadership," and the third prize went to "Leadership Traits," designed by students in Virginia.

Under Doors to Diplomacy rules, the websites must be in English, although many international students also create websites in their native languages. Each student team evaluates four other teams' entries, and then educational experts weigh in. Submissions from about 20 finalists are sent to the State Department, which selects the winners.

Each of the winning teams has created a website "that schools literally worldwide can benefit from," Andres said. "That's one of the powerful things about doing this on the Internet."

"When I look at the final results of this long project," she added, "I am just amazed at how fantastic some of these projects are. It is so rewarding, and it makes me happy that I'm doing the job that I'm doing."

In addition to the first-, second- and third-place winners, honorable mentions went to teams from China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Singapore and the United States.

Organic Halal Meat Industry Expanding in America

Industry insiders say Muslim-American interest in organic products growing

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — America's Muslim community is starting to go organic.

Businesses that prepare organic halal meat — meat prepared in keeping with the dietary practices of Islam — say Muslim Americans are following a nationwide trend

of opting for chemical-free, natural food sources.

But while the tendency to eat organic meat is growing, those involved in the budding industry say barriers remain before it fully takes root with Muslim Americans.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to spreading the organic halal message is in educating Muslim Americans about its benefits. Yasir Syeed, co-founder of online organic halal meat market Green Zabiha, says many Americans, Muslims included, buy meat from grocery stores without thinking about its origins.

"There is a lot of education that needs to take place about this in the Muslim community," Syeed says, "because a lot of people honestly just don't know where the meat is coming from."

Syeed, who started seeking organic halal meat after his children were born, says most meat in America comes from factory farms. Many meat and poultry businesses feed hormones and antibiotics to their animals. Syeed says this makes meat raised in these conditions unhealthy.

Apparently, many Americans agree.

The latest information from the U.S.-based Organic Trade Association says sales of organic products in the U.S., both food and nonfood, reached \$24.6 billion at the end of 2008, a 17.1 percent rise over 2007.

Although the organic business is growing, organic halal meat farmer Zaid Kurdieh says high prices for organic products impede further industry growth. Kurdieh, who owns Norwich Meadows Farm in New York state and sells organic poultry, says high prices make it difficult for him to compete.

"When somebody can go buy what is called a halal bird at the regular market for \$1.29 a pound when you charge \$4.00 to \$4.50 a pound, they accuse you of trying to rip them off or of making exorbitant profits," Kurdieh says.

An industrial system, Kurdieh says, is his competition in the poultry business.

"You have huge buildings that house anywhere from 25,000 to 1,000,000 birds, everything is automated, very little manual labor. It is a factory process," Kurdieh says. "Under those conditions, you can produce chickens really, really cheap."

Organic meat is also pricier because natural feed costs almost twice as much as conventional feed.

Despite the hurdles, Kurdieh says interest in organic halal

meat keeps growing.

"Right now, we really can't meet the demand," he says, adding that although Muslim customers are increasing, most of his clientele for meat is Jewish.

For Syeed and Kurdieh, halal is more than a ritual way of slaughtering an animal. Kurdieh last year began raising goats, lambs and beef organically for halal slaughter but soon abandoned the effort for humane and religious reasons.

"The big issue is that when the animal meets its maker, when it is sacrificed, it has to be done in a proper way, and a lot of Muslims who are slaughtering the animals right now don't do it in a proper way," Kurdieh says.

A slaughterhouse Kurdieh refused to use hangs up live lambs by driving a shackle through their ankles before slitting their throats.

"You are supposed to put it at ease at the time of death, not under duress, under extreme duress," Kurdieh says.

Like Kurdieh, for Syeed the halal process is about the whole life of the animal. Syeed says Islam teaches that animals must be treated well because they are created by God.

"What this is really about is restoring sacredness," Syeed says. "It is the idea that these animals, from a Muslim perspective, have a certain sacredness about them."

Muslims from the Baltimore and Washington area flock to Joseph Kavanagh's lamb and goat processing facility, Lambco LLC. Kavanagh's small plant caters to religious cultural groups, including halal for Muslims and kosher for Jews.

Although Lambco technically is not an organic operation, animals for slaughter come from local farms that do not use hormones and antibiotics. Lambco is recommended by the U.S.A. Halal/Zabiha Certification Association.

"Every month is better than the month before," Kavanagh said. "And it's strictly a word-of-mouth business."

As Kavanagh's business expands locally, Syeed's Green Zabiha is growing nationally and internationally. Syeed's new overseas market is a sign of the potential of organic halal meat as a business. In America, he is growing operations in California from his Virginia base to provide local meat, rather than ship it cross-country.

"I tell this to farmers all the time. I say, 'The best friends of these grass-fed, pasture-raised farms moving forward are going to be Muslims,'" Syeed says. "In our tradition, it is

so emphatic about the importance of eating pure and halal."

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